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ABSTRACT

A review of Canada's policy for languages for special purposes looks at (1) federal language policy as reflected in the Official Languages Act and the watchdog office of the Commissioner of Official Languages; (2) the policies of the provinces of New Brunswick, Quebec, and Ontario; and (3) the impact of governmental policy, and presents three case studies of French language instruction for use in health services. Canadian government policies have influenced the scope of language teaching to adults, and program content and design have been influenced by language teaching trends. Provincial policies have had a varying impact on language teaching for special purposes. In New Brunswick, community need has been a primary force in the health department's progressive policy. Quebec has been propelled into language teaching for special purposes by the adoption of French as an official language. Ontario, which is not an officially bilingual province, has designed its programs to meet an identified need rather than conforming to law. These experiences suggest that provincial policies may exert a greater influence on languages for special purposes than does federal law. (MSE)

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GOVERNMENTAL POLICY AND LANGUAGES

FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES IN CANADA

BY

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GOVERNMENTAL POLICY AND LANGUAGES FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES IN CANADA

I. INTRODUCTION

The longest undefended border in the world joins you with an officially bilingual country. Let me first give you an idea of our setting: Canada has 26 million inhabitants, close to 100 different linguistic backgrounds, is a large federal state made up of 10 provinces and 2 territories. English is the dominant language in 9 provinces and the territories. In the province of Quebec, French is the dominant language. Approximately 85% of Francophone and Anglophone minorities are concentrated within the provinces of Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick.

In this presentation, we will first consider Canadian federal policies regarding languages before focusing on provincial governments and their efforts in the promotion of languages for specific purposes. We are using here Mackay's definition of LSP: "the teaching of a second language for a clearly utilitarian purpose" taken to mean successful performance in work (Robinson). Because our main interest lies in the health care professions, we have focused our attention on that particular field.

II. FEDERAL LANGUAGE POLICY

1. THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

The status of the French language has fluctuated over the years. Demands for improvement were common in the early 1960's.

In July 1963, the federal government appointed a Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism under the co-chairmanship of A. Davidson Dunton and André Laurendeau. The Commission's wide-ranging Terms of Reference included inquiring into and

reporting upon the existing state of bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada and recommending what steps should be taken to develop the Canadian Confederation on the basis of an equal partnership between the two founding nations. The Commission also had to report upon the situation and practice of bilingualism within all branches and agencies of the federal administration, and in their communications with the public. It was required to make recommendations designed to ensure the bilingual and basically bicultural character of the federal administration. "It was also supposed to report on the role of public and private organizations... in promoting bilingualism... to discuss with the provincial governments the opportunities available to Canadians to learn the English and French languages and to recommend what could be done to enable Canadians to become bilingual". The first volume of the Commission's final report, published in December 1967, proposed measures to establish nation-wide equality in language for English and French. Its second volume, devoted largely to education in the two languages was issued in December 1968. In an effort to implement some of the recommendations of the Commission, the federal government passed the Official Languages Act in July 1969. **Every federal government department or agency, judicial body or Crown corporation had to ensure that in the federal capital or at its head office and at each of its principal offices in bilingual districts, it could offer available services and communicate with the public in both official languages.** This obviously had considerable repercussions in the second language teaching field. Programs were designed to enable civil servants to work in the country's other official language (English or French). The Public Service Commission of Canada developed mostly French as a second language programs as the Public Service was mainly composed of English-speaking staff. Their objectives were to better meet their students' needs and acquaint them with French-Canadian sociocultural and sociolinguistic contexts. The methods used were audio-visual and aimed at communication. A lot of effort and money were spent on this

honorable venture, but it did not yield the expected results, although it is estimated that 40 per cent of Canada's public servants now have some capacity in their second official language.

2. THE COMMISSIONER OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES: THE FEDERAL WATCHDOG

The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages was created to act as a watchdog for the implementation of the Official Languages Act and the progress made throughout the whole country regarding bilingualism and biculturalism. As the Office puts it: "The Commissioner of Official Languages has the duty to ensure that federal institutions comply with both the letter and the intent of the 1969 Official Languages Act so that the equal status of both English and French will be a reality in the federal domain. The raison d'être of the Commissioner is to promote language reform in Canada".

Years passed and the Act's stated goal had not been reached. The equality of the two official languages was still not fact. When the federal government repatriated the Constitution from Great Britain to Canada, some people thought that the status of French would be fully recognized. In the preface of his 1984 Annual Report, The Commissioner of Official Languages states: "The constitutional reform of 1981 marked a turning point for language rights in Canada. The solemn and specific reaffirmation of those same linguistic principles by a new parliamentary majority in the Throne Speech of November 5, 1984 confirmed the political commitment to reform".

Even though the federal government promised to see that the equality of the two official languages is respected in fact as it is in law, the language reform so often mentioned has not come about yet. D'Iberville Fortier, Canada's present Commissioner, warns that "since the proclamation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom in 1982, the federal official languages program has been largely in a state of suspended animation; its administrative pulse

is low and its financial life-support increasingly questionable". However, there are presently renewed talks of a "revamped Offical Languages Act" as an Ottawa reporter put it last month.

In the language teaching field, programs evolved with linguistic trends and the Public Service Commission now offers a variety of second language courses geared to secretaries, receptionists, and judges over and above its long-standing programs.

If language teaching was a major consideration in the early 1970's, the emphasis has now moved to preoccupations on federal programs for the minorities such as advertising in minority language medias, hiring practices, economic support, artistic and technical capacity and control in broadcasting, among others. It is interesting to notice that in a 1985 Colloquium on Canada's Official Languages Minorities, the issue of language teaching, be it for specific purposes or otherwise, did not surface.

III. PROVINCIAL LANGUAGE POLICIES

As federal civil servants were struggling to learn a second language throughout the country, some Provincial governments were studying the bilingualism question. Because of the time allotted to this presentation, we have arbitrarily focused on New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario.

1. The Province of New Brunswick

Statistics Canada acknowledges 33.6% minority official-language population in its 1981 census. The Official Languages Act of the province of New Brunswick, passed in 1969, stated that "the English and French languages are the official languages of New Brunswick for all purposes to which the authority of the Legislature of New Brunswick extends and possess and enjoy equality of status and equal

rights and privileges as to their use for such purposes". Civil servants and Crown Corporations staff had to be able to provide services in either official language as requested.

In 1981, the government passed another Act which, according to the 1984 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, affirmed "the equality of the two linguistic communities before the law; their right to distinct cultural, social and educational institutions and the government's obligation to promote, equally, the cultural, educational and social development of the two communities".

On the provincial as on the federal level, the gap between the adoption and the implementation of the acts led to further discontent of the minorities. All this should have entailed important efforts in the second language teaching field. Unfortunately, specialized second language courses are scarce. However, a valiant effort has recently been made in the New Brunswick Department of Health: a new regional hospital in Campbellton is due to open shortly and an agreement with the Centre universitaire de Shippagan de l'Université de Moncton has led to second language immersion courses for the employees of the two existing hospitals due to merge into this new institution. One hospital is primarily English and the other one French; the new hospital will be bilingual. In such a situation, specific language needs have to be met. Work-related language training to nurses, physicians, secretaries and allied health staff should be provided. As a matter of fact, the Campbellton Regional Hospital Language Program Coordinator has called upon the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario for help in providing specialized second language courses for its staff, eventually buying our nursing and medical programs for use in their province.

2. The Province of Quebec

In 1977, the provincial government passed the Charter of the French Language better known as Bill 101 which stated that French was the official language in the Province of Quebec.

French is therefore the working language. Soon after the Parti québécois came to power in November 1976, a number of second language training programs were designed with a specific clientèle in mind. Thus brand new courses for nurses, among others geared towards the professions were developed. Adaptations of some well-established programs to nursing were published and widely used. By then, the language teaching field had cast aside structuralism and hailed the communicative approach as the approach to use. Interestingly enough, these courses were geared to intermediate level students. The participants had to have some fluency in their second language before they were taught nursing lexis and language in professional situations. Second language proficiency was sanctioned by a Government language test for certification in the profession.

3. The Province of Ontario

Ontario had taken a somewhat timid stand on French language services under the Conservative government. When the Liberals came into power in 1985, they vowed to pass a French language services act which came into force in November 1986. Provincial ministries now have three years to provide French language services in any area with a substantial French-speaking population. It also established a Commission to examine the needs for improved francophone services and oversee implementation of the law. Hailed as the first important step towards declaring the province officially bilingual, the Act might lead to some important changes in the second language training program orientation of provincial civil servants who are

presently benefiting from general language courses. We may see specialized courses for Ontarian civil servants later on when the new programs are in place.

In that light, what can we say about governmental policy and languages for specific purposes?

IV. IMPACT OF GOVERNMENTAL POLICY

It seems reasonably safe to say that in Canada, the catalyst in second language teaching, be it for children or adults, has been the federal 1969 Official Languages Act. Federal civil servants may never have had to learn to work in their second language if it had not been for that law. Some provinces also felt the need to satisfy their minorities demands.

We have focused here on French as a second language as the Canadian population is mostly English-speaking. In primary and secondary education, tremendous progress has been achieved in language teaching. It is unfortunately somewhat different when we consider adult education and language for specific purposes. Most language training centres have moved away from the structural to the communicative approach and have adapted their teaching accordingly but have not really centered their programs on occupationally-related functions.

The teaching of French for specific purposes has not known the popularity its English counterpart enjoys. For almost twenty years now, it has been commonplace to speak about English for specific purposes, dividing it into English for Academic Purposes, English for Occupational Purposes and English for Science and Technology. No such exposure for French. The 1969 Federal Official Languages Act does not seem to have done much for languages <u>for specific purposes</u>. The 1969 New Brunswick Official Languages Act has not led to advances in LSP. It is too soon to see the impact of the Ontario French Language Services Act on LSP. Yet as we said earlier,

valiant efforts have been made in this area due to the necessity for English-speaking Quebec nurses to be able to work in French. It is interesting to note that Quebec has been at the forefront of advances in this respect because of governmental policy. We remain convinced that nothing of the sort would have been made available without the Parti québécois's insistance on French being the working language of the Province. It is because of their demands and their determination to implement Bill 101 that new programs have been designed. So the Province of Quebec seems to be ahead of the rest of the country with regards to French for specific purposes teaching.

V. CASE STUDIES

1. QUEBEC'S LE FRANCAIS DE L'HOPITAL

In 1979, the Quebec Immigration Ministry's linguistic branch elaborated a series of 16 dialogues and numerous exercises to help nurses towards proficiency and help them pass the linguistic proficiency test they were required to take for practice in the Province. Geared to students with a minimum of 400 hours of French and in an effort to be as realistic as possible, the program designers used semi-authentic dialogues to try and adjust as closely as possible to the type of exchanges heard in a hospital. The nurses and teachers who were participating in the taping were given an outline of the situation to be taped and improvised the conversation.

This program aims at putting the students in contact with the language as it is spoken by nurses and Quebec patients with varied linguistic skills, enables students to understand the patients, enables them to fulfil the language functions a nurse usually uses and to teach the specific vocabulary in a real-life situation.

2. QUEBEC'S NOUS VOUS SOIGNONS EN FRANCAIS

The Modern Languages Department of the Vanier College in the Province of Quebec has produced ten French as a second language training units entitled French for Nursing students where the participants have the chance to view a video of situations pertaining to the admission of a patient, pre-operative care, infant care, emergency situations to familiarize the student nurse to his/her upcoming French environment.

Other attempts have been made in Quebec to adapt second language teaching to the field of occupation whether in nursing or in other areas. Time is lacking to review each one of them in detail here.

3. ONTARIO'S SOIGNER LES PATIENTS EN FRANCAIS

In the meantime, a few hospitals in Ontario and especially in the National Capital were facing some difficulty in providing French language services to the public. In 1982, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario hired in-house educators to develop specific programs for medical secretaries, nurses and physicians. French language training had been offered there since 1977, but neither the Public Service Commission's nor a local college's programs had met the linguistic needs of the Hospital's staff. Its programs were to be occupationally-related and geared to real and false beginners. The teacher involved then observed staff in action in the appropriate departments and started designing 120-hour programs to enable the participants to communicate verbally with the parents, patients and the public at large.

Some of the topics included in the program for nurses are introductions in a hospital setting, welcoming a patient into a ward, inquiring about the location of pain, taking vital signs, explaining tests and procedures, describing effects of medication, giving information on the condition of a patient, taking a patient's family history, reassuring, encouraging and congratulating a

patient. In the medical field, you can find topics such as taking the clinical history of a patient, explaining various diseases and their treatment, getting information from the patient and his family, giving advice to the patient regarding the management of the disease, explaining various tests.

Secretaries for their part will give, cancel or change appointments, give, take and leave messages, give directions, ask for information, respond to requests, give and check information.

The Centre for Second Language Learning of the University of Ottawa has for its part set up a program for nurses, taking the situation of a nurse in the Emergency Department as a basis of study for a variety of language acts.

These endeavors do not stem from governmental policy, but rather from a perceived need in the community. No law dictated the designing of such programs.

VI. CONCLUSION

So Canadian governmental policies have influenced language teaching to adults. However, they have not been the only factor. On the federal level, policies have led to specific programs geared to civil servants but program content has been influenced by language teaching trends as we have seen the federal Public Service Commission move away from an audio-visual to a communicative and a more occupationally-related type of program.

In the provinces, the force of governmental policies impact on language teaching for specific purposes varies.

In New Brunswick, policy but mostly community need have led to the forward-looking approach adopted by the Department of Health. It is too early to assess the results but the situation is closely

monitored and it will certainly be interesting to follow it up as health care professionals acquire proficiency in their second language for use in the Campbellton Regional Hospital.

Quebec has definitely been propelled into language teaching for specific purposes by the passage of Bill 101. Specialized programs for the professions may never have seen the light of day if French had not been declared the Province's only official language, compelling people to work in that language.

Ontario, on the other hand, is not an officially bilingual province as is New Brunswick. It is opening the door to French becoming more and more recognized, and has already acknowledged the importance of French language services in fact if not yet in law. Its existing language for specific purposes programs have been designed to meet an identified need rather than as conformity to a law. You can then see the variety of situations in which Canada finds itself. Provincial policies may exert a greater influence on LSP than federal acts. The amendments we hear about as regards Canada's Official Languages Act are rumored to bear on the legal status of Parliament, legal recourse and bilingual districts. Language teaching is not a preoccupation any more. This might be explained by the growing number of bilingual adolescents who will be the workers of tomorrow and will have acquired proficiency in their second language through the education system. The new generation will not need language teaching for specific purposes as much as their parents do. Yet there is a greater perception of the need for LSP among adult educators than in the political arena. LSP is more effective and cost efficient than general conversational language teaching programs. Governments should be made aware of that fact. If language teaching has advanced over the years, it may be because of governmental policy. In the final analysis, isn't policy-making usually the result of grassroot demands?

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